

INSPECTION REPORT

Dubai National School - Al Barsha

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Dubai National School - Al Barsha

Location	Al Barsha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.dnsalbarsha.com
Telephone	04 3474555
Address	P.O. Box 24060
Principal	Mohamed Riad El-Merabi
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Ages / Grades	4-17 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	2,579
Number of Emirati students	1,751 (68%)
Date of the inspection	22nd to 26th January 2012

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The context of the school

Dubai National School - Al Barsha is situated in Al Barsha. The school opened in 1988. At the time of the inspection, the school had a total roll of 2,579 students. The school follows a US curriculum.

There were 210 full-time teachers, including the Director and the senior leadership team, and one part-time teacher. Ninety-eight per cent of teachers had appropriate teaching qualifications. They were supported by 44 teaching assistants. Students were grouped in 113 classes. The majority of students were Emirati. Thirty-six nationalities were represented among the student population.

At the time of the inspection, the Director was in his 24th year in office and the Principal in his second. Fifty-nine teachers were newly appointed.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Dubai National School – Al Barsha provided a good quality of education, with some very strong features. The school very effectively promoted Islamic values. Attainment and progress in all key subjects at all phases were good, with a particular focus on developing appropriate skills in English across the curriculum. The quality of students’ personal and social education was good and, in certain aspects, outstanding. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good, with some outstanding examples of classroom practice. The curriculum was good, although programmes for the gifted and talented were under-developed. The school offered students good levels of protection and support. Leadership was outstanding at all levels and leaders’ teamwork and rigorous approaches were impacting positively on improvement. The school had the clear capacity to continue to improve.

The school had broadly made good progress towards addressing the recommendations from the previous report. It had continued to develop rigorous assessment procedures but these did not yet focus sufficiently on students’ development of key skills. The school and governing board had increased parental involvement, but this required further development. The school had planned well for professional development in areas such as providing challenge for higher achieving students, although this aspect was not consistent across all classrooms.

Key strengths

- The strong Islamic values embedded in the life and work of the school;
- Good attainment and progress across the key subjects;
- The outstanding Islamic, cultural, civic, economic and environmental understanding of middle and high school students;
- Some examples of outstanding teaching and learning across the school, particularly in English and mathematics in the high school phase;
- The outstanding leadership at all levels and its impact on a range of continuous school improvement.

Recommendations

- Ensure a consistency of teaching and learning across subjects and phases;
- Offer a suitably wide range of opportunities to develop the potential of gifted and talented students;
- Improve the assessment of students' critical thinking, reasoning and learning skills to ensure that teachers match tasks and activities effectively to the needs of individual students;
- Use improvement planning to manage whole school developments more systematically.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
English				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Science				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good

Attainment was good in all subjects across the school. By the end of elementary, students could recite short verses of the Qur'an and, in high school, they could effectively analyse their recitations. In Arabic, students generally read with confidence but extended and free writing skills were underdeveloped. In the middle school, students could use English well to access the curriculum and, in the high school, many demonstrated high levels of fluency. Students progressively developed a good range of mathematical

skills in the earlier stages and, in the high school, were able to carry out complicated calculations and algebraic manipulations accurately. In science, they gained a secure knowledge and understanding across the three areas of life, earth and physical science. Key practical and processing skills were less strong.

Progress across all phases and in all key subjects was good. The majority of students made good progress in their understanding of Islamic concepts and etiquette. In Arabic as a first language, progress was better in elementary and in the girls' section. In Arabic as a second language, teachers' expectations of progress was not routinely high enough. Progress in English in the elementary phase was restricted by an insufficient immersion in the language. In mathematics, the majority of students made better than expected progress. In science, stronger progress was made when classwork was effectively differentiated to meet the needs of all students. Students with special educational needs made good progress, but the progress of gifted and talented students was limited because there was little additional challenge.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good across all phases of the school. Almost all students displayed high levels of maturity and positive attitudes towards their school, their learning and healthy living. They were proud of the school's focus on Islamic traditions and culture. Attendance in the last term was good, but punctuality was weak. Students in the Kindergarten and elementary phases demonstrated a clear understanding of Islam and its impact on the society of Dubai, in addition to an appreciation of the traditions and heritage of the UAE. Middle and high school students showed an outstanding appreciation of

these areas and the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. Civic, economic and environmental understanding was good in the Kindergarten and the elementary phase, where young students demonstrated appreciable understanding. Performance was outstanding in the middle and high school phases. Students were able to discuss in depth the major economic developments of Dubai. All students participated in energy conservation and recycling initiatives.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

The quality of teaching in the key subjects was good in all phases. Teachers' knowledge of their subject was sound. They planned lessons well and started with a clear explanation of what students were going to learn. Review of learning at the end of lessons was a less regular feature. Teachers used resources, including information and communications technology (ICT) well, for example when teachers used presentations in English and mathematics lessons. Teachers questioned classes well to assess students' learning and used praise effectively to motivate students. Their expectations of what students could achieve were mostly demanding enough, particularly in girls' classes in the high school. However, teachers did not consistently meet the needs of all students in lessons.

The quality of teaching in other subjects was good. For example, teachers developed students' skills and confidence by teaching classmates in some subjects, including business studies. In physical education, teachers motivated students very well so that they made impressive progress. Teachers in practical subjects, such as computing and home economics, gave clear explanations and good support to students.

The quality of learning was good in all phases. Relationships between students and teachers were positive and students were keen to gain knowledge and skills. Strong and active engagement of students in their learning was particularly evident in some subjects, for example in high school girls' classes in mathematics and English. Some outstanding lessons were observed in these areas. When lessons were in part led by

students, their confidence in thinking and talking about the subject developed greatly. This good practice was evident in English, mathematics and science. In most lessons, teachers took the opportunity to link learning to the outside world or to other subjects. Students benefited when they had opportunities to develop critical thinking and independent learning skills. However, these opportunities were inconsistent across subjects and stages.

Assessment was good in all phases. The school was making progress in improving its systems for assessing the achievement of students. Assessment as part of lessons was effective, through questioning and explanations to class, groups and individuals. Most teachers knew the strengths and development needs of their students. In a few lessons, students' self-assessment was developing well. Teachers did not consistently offer students feedback to explain what they needed to do to improve their critical thinking and learning skills. They needed to match the assessment methods more effectively to the knowledge, skills and understanding they wished students to achieve.

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of students?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

The quality of the curriculum was good across all four phases. It offered breadth, balance, progression and continuity, and was reviewed at least annually. The school had not yet implemented programmes to fully meet the needs of all students. Kindergarten and Grade 1 provided good opportunities for learning through English immersion for non-native speakers. The primary focus of the elementary school was on the successful development of speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. The programmes for mathematics and English were particularly strong at the high school level and prepared students well for university and the world of work. Cross-curricular links existed in most key subjects and library classes enhanced opportunities to do research. The curriculum was enriched further with social studies, home economics, computer literacy, art, and physical education, all of which offered new skills and challenges. A wide array of clubs, sports, activities, charity work and student council events promoted students' awareness of the community.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

The provision for students' health and safety was good. All maintenance concerns were well documented and acted upon. Fire evacuation procedures were effective. Ramps enabled students with physical impairment to access all classrooms. Staff managed students well so that their behaviour was good during lessons and at break-times. Students' physical and emotional health was rigorously monitored by the school nurses, doctor and counsellor. A focus on healthy lifestyles was built into the curriculum in Kindergarten and promoted through science. A nutritionist monitored the food at the canteen. A range of sports and activities were available after school. The child protection policy was clearly understood by all, and students could readily discuss their concerns with the counsellor and the supervisors.

The quality of support was good across the school, and outstanding in Kindergarten. Positive staff and student relationships ensured that students' well-being was a priority. Support for medical and emotional needs was good. There was an extensive programme to prepare students for next stages. Students with special educational needs were admitted to the school and there was a robust process to identify their needs. The special needs' register had been restructured and staff had created detailed individual educational plans. There was no specific in-class support, but teachers were aware of needs and the curriculum was adapted where necessary. Staff workshops ensured understanding of individuals' needs. There were good systems to promote attendance, but the school had yet to resolve some punctuality issues.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Good

Leadership was outstanding. The Director offered the school a very clear philosophy of education which - underpinned the school's on-going development. He and the senior leadership team were highly competent professionals and offered strong leadership and a clear sense of direction. The distributed leadership model successfully empowered middle managers, who made a strong contribution to the effectiveness of leadership across the school. Leaders had maintained good standards across a number of areas and had demonstrated a clear impact on aspects of teaching and learning. They demonstrated a clear capacity to support continued improvement.

The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school had put in place a range of methods for reviewing its work. Classroom observations took place regularly and the focus on improving individual teacher performance was particularly rigorous. The effective planning for professional development supported improvement. Assessment data was analysed and the findings led to changes in curriculum and teaching. The school's self-evaluation report was comprehensive and leaders recognised the value of involving all staff. The school's improvement plan was comprehensive and reviewed regularly. Senior leaders did not focus sufficiently clearly on the key areas of classroom practice they wished to improve, nor did they systematically implement any changes of practice across the school.

Partnership with parents was good. There was good two-way communication between school and individual parents. Newsletters, reports, parent conferences and the user-friendly website kept them well informed about their child's progress and the curriculum. However, parents did not receive clear enough information about the school's plans for improvement. The Parent Council made a valued contribution to the partnership with parents. There was a good range of expected links with the community, enriching students' overall experience.

Governance was acceptable. There was a highly professional relationship between the school's leadership and the Governing Board, and the school was well supported by the Board. There were opportunities for the school to present reports and for these to be discussed. The agenda was comprehensive. The school had maintained a Parents' Advisory Group which offered the school opportunities to involve them as advisors in the decision-making process. The Governing Board had recently added a parent representative to its membership.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources at the school was good. The day-to-day routines and requirements were well understood by all. Almost all teachers were suitably qualified. The school had a very sound programme for the induction of new teachers and provided a good range of professional development for all teachers. The school campus provided a spacious learning environment. There were very good displays around the school, celebrating students' work. The school's resourcing was good in a number of areas, however it did not provide students with sufficient access to ICT.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	330	25%
	Last year	332	23%
Teachers	114		52%
Students	114		32%

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

About a quarter of parents responded to the questionnaire. Of these, most expressed satisfaction with the quality of education in the school. They thought their children enjoyed being at school and were well looked after. They judged the school to be well led. About a quarter did not think there was a good enough range of subjects their child could choose from. Almost all teachers who responded felt part of a professional team. Most thought that the school was well led and the majority that their continuing

professional development was well supported. About 20 per cent did not feel that they were suitably involved in the process of whole school self-evaluation and improvement planning. Of the students who responded, the majority stated that they enjoyed life at school. Most felt the teaching was good and that they were making good progress in their key subjects. Over a third of respondents did not think they could choose from a sufficient range of subjects.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact:
inspection@khda.gov.ae

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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